

# Understanding Theology in 15 Minutes A Day for 40 Days

## Day 21

### Is the Resurrection of Jesus Really That Important?

The bodily, historical resurrection of Jesus is surely the most momentous event in all of history. I say “bodily” because many have said they believe in the resurrection of Jesus, but it is a spiritual resurrection, not a bodily one. The thinking is that Jesus becomes spiritually “alive” within a person. I say “historical” because many others have denied that Jesus was resurrected as an historical event. The naturalistic mindset certainly resists believing such a magnificent miracle.

Is this really all that important? Isn't it really the *death* of Jesus that is of ultimate significance for Christianity? Wouldn't it be easier for many more people to believe if the resurrection were not a central part of what Christians believe—or at least if it were easier to make sense of it?

#### Why the Resurrection Is Centrally Imperative

In truth, Christ's resurrection is absolutely vital to Christianity and our salvation, and as such, the fact appears in the earliest creeds of the faith, two of them being the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. Paul wrote of it in **1 Corinthians 15**, his great chapter on resurrection. He included it in his succinct statement of the gospel itself in **verses 1–8** (note especially verse 4). The problem he was addressing was that some were saying, “*There is no resurrection of the dead*” (**v. 12**), that is, the resurrection is not an important part of the gospel or of faith in Christ. Paul is unambiguous in his response:

*If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.... [In that case] you are still in your sins.*

**vv. 13–14, 17**

If Jesus were not brought back from the dead after his sacrifice, *there would be no salvation*. We would have nothing to believe, nothing to put our faith in.

**So just why is Jesus' resurrection so vital?**

**First,** his resurrection was essentially the Father's "stamp of approval" on Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice. The Father accepted his work, and the basis for the plan of salvation was successfully laid. In his great Pentecost sermon, the apostle Peter said, *"God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. [He is] exalted to the right hand of God ..."* (**Acts 2:32–33; see also Philippians 2:8–9**). The Father exalted his Son for successfully accomplishing what he had been sent to do: to die in our place and pay for our sins. This is why Paul can say, *"[Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification"* (**Romans 4:25**).

**Second,** his resurrection demonstrates that Christ's death defeated death:  
*When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality [that is, after resurrection], then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."  
"Where, O death, is your victory?  
Where, O death, is your sting?"  
The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

#### **1 Corinthians 15:54–57**

A Savior who was conquered by death could not himself conquer death. But Jesus was not conquered by death—just the opposite is true. His resurrection is evidence of this great victory (**2 Timothy 1:10; Hebrews 2:14–15**).

**Third,** his resurrection provides spiritual life for believers in him, that is, it results in their regeneration—being born again. *"In [God's] great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"* (**1 Peter 1:3**). Related to this is that Christians have *already* experienced *spiritual* resurrection, even as we await physical resurrection (**Ephesians 2:5–6**).

And it gets even better, because all this means believers have access to the same divine power that brought Jesus back from the **dead** (**Ephesians 1:18–20; Philippians 3:10**). Specifically, this power helps us defeat sin. Paul says we have been united with Christ in both his death and resurrection, and for this reason he can say,

*Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as*

*those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.*

**Romans 6:11–13 (See vv. 3–14.)**

**Fourth,** His resurrection is the *first-fruits* of resurrection (**1 Corinthians 15:20, 23**). This Old Testament term refers to the very first part of the harvest, given in thanks to God for providing it. But the first-fruits also guarantee latter fruits, that is, there is more of the harvest to come. So as first-fruits, Jesus' resurrection guarantees the resurrection of believers in him.

**Colossians 1:18 and Revelation 1:5** make the same point by referring to Jesus as the *firstborn* from the dead. Again, believers have experienced spiritual resurrection and await physical resurrection, which is guaranteed by Jesus' resurrection. This is a part of our hope in him and the completion of our eternal humanity (**1 Corinthians 6:14; 2 Corinthians 4:14**; remember, to be human is to have a physical body).

Finally, Jesus' resurrection should encourage Christians to be faithful in obeying and working for the Lord. This is Paul's concluding statement at the end of **1 Corinthians 15**:

*Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*

**v. 58**

Jesus' resurrection, the basis for *our* hope of resurrection, means that, when all is said and done, all the hard work of being faithful to Christ in this life will be more than worth it.

### **The Resurrection Is a Historical Event**

The resurrection of Jesus is inseparable from salvation and must be believed as part of the gospel itself. And no one is foolish to embrace faith in his bodily, historical resurrection. The solid evidence for it includes the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to many people, including the women at the tomb (**Matthew 28:1–10**), the apostles (**Luke 24:36–49**), and hundreds of others (**1 Corinthians 15:6**). Those who saw him were convinced Jesus was very much alive. And many of them, including the apostles, died for their faith in the resurrected Jesus Christ; people do not give their lives for what they know to be a lie.

### INTERESTING FACT

Frank Morison was a British journalist who set out to prove that Christ's resurrection never happened. As he investigated whether there was any legally acceptable evidence for it, he became so convinced by the sufficient and compelling support he found that he wrote *Who Moved the Stone: A Skeptic Looks at the Death and Resurrection of Jesus* (Zondervan, 1987). Its first chapter—"The Book That Refused to Be Written"—reflects his conversion.